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Beyond Mobility: Managing Multidimensional Risks in International Internships

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to identify and systematically categorize the multidimensional risks inherent in international internships within tourism and hospitality; to evaluate the impact of identified risks on student well-being, academic achievement, and professional development; to assess the magnitude and implications of the expectation–reality gap in international internship experiences and to develop a structured and context-sensitive risk-mapping and mitigation framework to improve program quality and stakeholder accountability.

Design/methodology/approach: This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual research design based on systematic literature synthesis and contextual analysis of international internship practices, with particular reference to tourism education in Oman. Peer-reviewed studies, policy documents, and risk governance literature were critically examined to identify recurring vulnerability dimensions. The findings were integrated into a structured multidimensional risk mapping framework linking internship objectives, stakeholder roles, and mitigation mechanisms.

Findings: The study identifies five interrelated risk domains in international internships: financial, legal and regulatory, psychosocial, organizational, and geopolitical. These risks interact across student, institutional, and employer levels. The findings demonstrate that while international internships enhance employability and intercultural competence, inadequate governance structures amplify vulnerabilities. The proposed framework systematically aligns developmental objectives with risk mitigation strategies, offering a structured approach to safer and more equitable mobility programs.

Research Implications: This study advances internship scholarship by integrating employability theory with risk governance perspectives. It moves beyond fragmented analyses of isolated challenges and proposes a multidimensional framework applicable across disciplines. The model provides a foundation for empirical validation, comparative cross-country research, and quantitative risk assessment studies, particularly within emerging tourism economies where structured governance of international placements remains underdeveloped.

Social Implications: By identifying structural vulnerabilities in international internships, the study highlights the need for equitable access, ethical supervision, and stronger institutional oversight. The framework supports safer global mobility, protects economically disadvantaged students, and promotes responsible industry participation. In tourism-dependent economies, improved internship governance can enhance workforce development while safeguarding student well-being and professional integrity.

Originality / Value: This study develops an integrated Internship Risk Mapping Framework that systematically connects internship objectives with multidimensional risk domains and stakeholder responsibilities. Unlike prior studies that examine benefits or risks independently, this research offers a comprehensive governance-oriented model adaptable beyond tourism education. The framework provides conceptual clarity and practical guidance for managing international internship programs in increasingly complex global environments.

Keywords: International Internships, Work-Integrated Learning, Risk Governance, Intercultural Competence, Tourism and Hospitality Education.
JEL: I23, J24, J44, Z32, F22.

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Introduction

International internships have increasingly become a strategic component of higher education, particularly within tourism and hospitality programs where experiential learning is central to professional development. Universities position these opportunities as pathways to enhanced employability, intercultural competence, global networking, and accelerated career progression. Through exposure to diverse workplace environments, students are expected to acquire practical skills, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication capabilities that are highly valued in global labour markets.

However, despite their perceived advantages, international internships are embedded within complex socio-economic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts that generate multidimensional risks. Students participating in overseas placements often encounter challenges that extend beyond normal workplace adjustment. These include financial insecurity, visa and legal complications, discriminatory treatment, workplace exploitation, inadequate supervision, health emergencies, political instability, and psychological stress arising from cultural dislocation. Such risks can undermine the intended learning outcomes of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs and negatively affect student well-being.

The tourism and hospitality sectors present additional vulnerabilities due to their reliance on seasonal employment, hierarchical labour structures, and customer-facing roles that may expose interns to exploitation or unsafe working conditions. In countries such as Oman, where tourism development is linked to economic diversification strategies and Omanisation policies, international internships operate within unique regulatory and labour market dynamics. While these placements contribute to skill development and global exposure, they may also reflect structural inequalities, limited monitoring mechanisms, and ambiguous institutional responsibilities.

A growing body of literature highlights an "expectation–reality gap" in international internships. Students frequently embark on placements anticipating meaningful professional tasks, cultural enrichment, and mentorship. In contrast, many report being assigned routine or menial duties, experiencing social isolation, or encountering unanticipated workplace pressures. This misalignment between expectations and lived experiences not only affects satisfaction but may also compromise academic performance, career confidence, and psychological well-being.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to international mobility and WIL programs, existing studies often examine risks in isolation—focusing separately on cultural adjustment, financial burden, or labour exploitation. There remains a lack of an integrated framework that systematically maps these diverse risks across stakeholders and contextual dimensions. This study addresses that gap by proposing a multidimensional risk-mapping framework that synthesizes academic research, institutional documentation, and documented student experiences. The framework aims to provide a structured, replicable tool for enhancing program design, monitoring, and policy effectiveness in international internships, particularly within tourism and hospitality education.

Problem Statement

International internships are widely promoted as transformative educational experiences that enhance employability and intercultural competence. However, the structural and operational realities of such programs reveal significant vulnerabilities that are insufficiently examined within institutional planning and risk assessment processes.

Students frequently bear disproportionate burdens associated with overseas placements. Financial constraints, including travel costs, accommodation expenses, unpaid or underpaid labor, and fluctuating exchange rates, disproportionately affect students from lower-income backgrounds, potentially limiting equitable access to global opportunities. Additionally, cultural shock, language barriers, discrimination, and social isolation may compromise psychological well-being and academic engagement.

Emerging global risks further complicate internship experiences. Geopolitical instability, public health crises, changing immigration regulations, and security threats can abruptly disrupt placements and leave students without adequate institutional support. In some cases, weak monitoring mechanisms allow exploitative practices to persist, including excessive working hours, lack of mentorship, harassment, or unclear contractual protections.

Although universities and employers promote international internships as structured learning environments, accountability mechanisms are often fragmented. Institutional oversight may be limited once students are placed abroad, and risk assessment procedures may not fully account for local labour conditions, socio-political contexts, or sector-specific vulnerabilities. Consequently, there is a disconnect between promotional narratives and operational safeguards.

The absence of a comprehensive, multidimensional risk-mapping approach represents a critical gap in the literature and in institutional practice. Without systematic identification and categorization of risks across academic, financial, socio-cultural, health, and geopolitical dimensions, stakeholders lack evidence-based tools to design preventive and corrective strategies. This study seeks to address this deficiency by developing an integrated framework that enhances program effectiveness while safeguarding student well-being.

Research Questions

1. What are the principal multidimensional risks associated with international internships in the tourism and hospitality sectors?
2. How do these risks affect student well-being, academic learning outcomes, and career development?
3. To what extent does an expectation–reality gap exist between students' pre-internship expectations and their actual experiences?
4. What targeted mitigation strategies can institutions and host organizations implement to reduce risks and enhance internship effectiveness, particularly in contexts such as Oman?

Research Objectives

1. To identify and systematically categorize the multidimensional risks inherent in international internships within tourism and hospitality.
2. To evaluate the impact of identified risks on student well-being, academic achievement, and professional development.
3. To assess the magnitude and implications of the expectation–reality gap in international internship experiences.
4. To develop a structured and context-sensitive risk-mapping and mitigation framework to improve program quality and stakeholder accountability.

Review of Literature

Conceptual Foundations of Internships and Work-Integrated Learning

Internships are structured work-based learning experiences designed to integrate academic knowledge with professional practice. Within higher education, internships are positioned under Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), which emphasizes collaboration between universities and industry partners to facilitate experiential learning (Patrick et al., 2008; Fleming & Haigh, 2017).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory provides the pedagogical foundation for internships, arguing that knowledge is created through cycles of experience, reflection, and application. Bandura & Walter's (1977) social learning theory further explains how workplace environments shape behavioural learning through observation and interaction. Trede (2012) expands this perspective by linking WIL to professional identity formation, while Mezirow (1991) conceptualizes internships as transformative learning experiences.

From a career theory standpoint, internships enhance human capital (Becker, 1964), foster career adaptability (Savickas, 1997), and align with the boundaryless career paradigm (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Together, these theoretical perspectives establish internships as strategic mechanisms for employability development rather than temporary training arrangements.

Empirical Evidence on Internship Outcomes

Empirical research consistently demonstrates the positive developmental effects of internships. Coco (2000) conceptualized internships as mutually beneficial arrangements between employers and students. Feldman and Weitz (1990) identified supervision quality and meaningful task allocation as predictors of positive internship experiences.

Internships have been linked to improved employability and labour market outcomes (Gault et al., 2010; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), enhanced academic value (Binder et al., 2015), and skill development (Jackson, 2015). Hora et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of student-centred internship design, while Zopiatis and Constanti (2012) propose structured management frameworks for hospitality placements.

Despite these documented benefits, scholars caution that outcomes are highly contingent on institutional oversight and employer commitment.

Internships in Tourism and Hospitality Education

Tourism and hospitality education relies heavily on internships due to the sector's operational and service-oriented nature (Lashley, 2016). Barron (2008) emphasizes the need to align hospitality education with talent management practices, while Baum (2015) critiques ongoing human resource development challenges in tourism.

Richardson (2008) found that internship experiences significantly influence students' attitudes toward hospitality careers. Ladkin & Buhalis (2016) further note that recruitment practices in hospitality have evolved through digital and globalized platforms, affecting internship access and expectations.

Although internships are central to hospitality curricula, hierarchical structures and demanding work environments may produce mixed developmental outcomes, reinforcing the need for governance mechanisms (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012).

International Internships and Global Competence

International internships extend WIL into cross-border contexts, enhancing intercultural and global competencies. Baker et al. (2011) argue that internationalized cooperative education strengthens employability outcomes. Hunter (2004) and Deardorff (2006) conceptualize intercultural competence as a measurable outcome of international engagement.

Crossman and Clarke (2010) and Jones (2013) establish a direct link between international experience and graduate employability. Mobility frameworks such as Erasmus+ (European Commission, 2023; European University Association, 2025) institutionalize international internships within policy-driven higher education internationalization strategies.

These developments align with boundaryless career theory (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001), suggesting that mobility contributes to long-term career capital accumulation.

Risks and Vulnerabilities in International Internships

Recent scholarship has shifted attention toward risks embedded in international internships. Hey & Fleming (2021) and Odlin et al. (2022) highlight the growing importance of risk management frameworks in WIL governance.

Tan et al. (2023) identify supervision inconsistencies, cultural adjustment challenges, and institutional coordination gaps in international placements. Udah & Francis (2022) further document vulnerabilities faced by international students, including financial stress and discrimination. Drawing on Allport's (1954) theory of prejudice, discriminatory experiences can significantly impact psychological well-being and professional outcomes.

Perlin (2012) critiques exploitative internship practices, particularly unpaid arrangements that disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged students.

These studies collectively demonstrate that international internships expose students to multidimensional risks spanning financial, psychosocial, legal, and institutional domains. However, the literature remains fragmented, with risks examined in isolation rather than through integrated governance models.

Tourism Education and Internship Context in Oman

Tourism development plays a strategic role in Oman's economic diversification (Al-Touqi & Krishnamurthy, 2024). Human capital formation within hospitality is therefore critical (Khan & Krishnamurthy, 2016). Internships function as key mechanisms for preparing Omani students for participation in the sector.

Given Oman's increasing engagement with international tourism markets, international internships provide opportunities for skill acquisition and global exposure. However, structural labour conditions and career perception challenges within hospitality (Baum, 2015; Richardson, 2008) suggest that careful governance is necessary to maximize benefits while mitigating risks.

Identified Research Gap

Although the literature robustly documents internship benefits (Coco, 2000; Gault et al., 2010; Binder et al., 2015) and acknowledges emerging risk concerns (Tan et al., 2023; Hey & Fleming, 2021; Odlin et al., 2022), there remains limited integration between developmental objectives and risk governance.

Existing studies typically focus either on employability outcomes or on isolated risk factors. There is insufficient theoretical synthesis linking internship objectives, multidimensional risks, stakeholder responsibilities, and mitigation mechanisms—particularly within tourism education in emerging economies such as Oman.

This gap justifies the development of an integrated, multidimensional risk mapping framework capable of systematically aligning internship benefits with structured governance mechanisms.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a ***systematic literature review (SLR)*** combined with a ***multi-source thematic analysis*** of secondary data to construct a comprehensive risk-mapping framework for international internships. The review process followed a structured search, screening, and synthesis protocol to ensure transparency and rigour.

Academic sources were identified through targeted searches in major scholarly databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. Search strings incorporated combinations of keywords such as *international internship risks*, *student global mobility safety*, *tourism and hospitality placements abroad*, and *Erasmus+ internship challenges*. To ensure contemporary relevance, the search was limited to publications from 2018 to 2025.

To enhance contextual depth and practical relevance, the review was supplemented with institutional reports, policy documents, sectoral analyses, and credible media coverage. Selected materials included publications from higher education associations, peer-reviewed journals specializing in international education and tourism studies, and reputable international media outlets. In addition, publicly available student narratives and professional reflections from platforms such as LinkedIn and moderated online forums were examined to capture experiential dimensions of risk. Hashtag-based searches (e.g., #InternAbroad, #InternshipAbuse) were used to identify recurring themes in publicly shared accounts between 2021 and 2024.

Inclusion criteria were restricted to English-language sources that explicitly addressed student-facing risks in overseas internship settings. Priority was given to studies examining discrimination, financial strain, legal vulnerabilities, health and safety concerns, workplace exploitation, and socio-political instability. Particular attention was paid to tourism and hospitality placements and to contexts relevant to Oman and the Gulf region. From approximately 150 initially identified items, 45 core sources were selected following relevance screening and quality appraisal based on empirical robustness, analytical clarity, and evidentiary contribution.

Data were subjected to manual qualitative coding using an inductive–deductive approach. Identified risks were categorized into five principal domains: academic, financial, health and safety, job-related, and socio-political/legal. Thematic synthesis enabled the development of stakeholder-based risk-mapping tables linking risk categories to impacts and mitigation strategies.

As a desk-based investigation, the study ensures breadth of coverage across diverse evidence streams. However, it acknowledges limitations associated with reliance on secondary data, including potential reporting bias and the absence of direct primary field validation.

Analysis & Findings

The analysis demonstrates that international internships, although positioned as transformative opportunities for intercultural exposure and career advancement, are embedded in complex and multidimensional risk environments. Evidence synthesized from peer-reviewed research, institutional documentation, media investigations, and student narratives reveals that these risks are neither isolated nor incidental; rather, they are systemic and often interconnected.

Across sources, four dominant thematic clusters emerged:
1.Discrimination and socio-political risks
2.Financial vulnerability
3.Expectation–reality misalignment
4.Institutional accountability gaps

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1. *Discrimination and Socio-Political Risks*

The literature consistently highlights experiences of racism, exclusion, and cultural marginalization during international placements. Such experiences undermine intercultural learning objectives and erode students' professional confidence. Reports on Erasmus+ mobility indicate that anti-immigration sentiment and subtle workplace bias can negatively shape the internship experience. Informal student narratives from online forums further corroborate patterns of differential treatment by supervisors or peers.

Beyond interpersonal discrimination, macro-level socio-political factors—such as policy shifts, visa instability, civil unrest, or geopolitical tensions—create structural uncertainties. These risks extend beyond academic inconvenience; they can abruptly disrupt placements, compromise safety, and generate psychological stress. In tourism and hospitality contexts, where interns are often customer-facing, exposure to culturally sensitive interactions may intensify vulnerability.

2. *Financial Risks and Economic Precarity*

Financial strain emerged as one of the most pervasive themes across all data sources. Even where stipends or grants are available, they frequently fail to offset the full costs of accommodation, food, transportation, visa processing, and insurance. Media reports on unpaid internships illustrate how students may inadvertently subsidize host organizations through uncompensated labour.

Financial insecurity has cascading effects. It contributes to psychological stress, restricts social integration, limits access to safe housing, and may force early termination of placements. Students from lower-income backgrounds are disproportionately affected, raising concerns regarding equity and inclusiveness in global mobility programs.

3. *Health, Safety, and Environmental Risks*

Health-related vulnerabilities include inadequate insurance coverage, limited access to reliable healthcare systems, exposure to epidemics, and occupational hazards. In addition, environmental risks such as natural disasters, unsafe housing conditions, and transportation accidents introduce tangible threats to physical safety. Security risks—ranging from petty crime to broader instability—are particularly salient in high-risk or politically sensitive regions. Even where actual incidents are rare, the perception of insecurity can negatively affect student well-being and concentration. These findings highlight the importance of structured safety protocols, crisis preparedness, and institutional communication channels.

4. *Cultural Adjustment and Psychological Risks*

Culture shock remains a widely reported challenge. Language barriers, unfamiliar workplace hierarchies, and divergent social norms often result in feelings of isolation and reduced confidence. Psychological risks—including homesickness, stress, and loneliness—compound academic and professional pressures.

These emotional dimensions are not peripheral; they directly influence learning engagement, task performance, and internship satisfaction. Where institutional support mechanisms are weak, psychological strain may culminate in premature withdrawal.

5. *Legal and Administrative Risks*

Misunderstandings of local laws, visa conditions, employment regulations, or contractual obligations can expose interns to fines, deportation, or reputational damage. Inadequate documentation and poorly defined learning agreements further intensify vulnerability. The findings indicate that administrative clarity and legal literacy are essential preventive mechanisms.

6. *Expectation–Reality Gap*

Pre-departure surveys consistently reflect optimism regarding skill acquisition, structured mentorship, and cultural enrichment. However, post-placement reflections frequently reveal disillusionment, particularly where interns are assigned routine tasks, lack supervision, or encounter hostile work environments.

This expectation–reality gap represents a critical conceptual finding. It demonstrates that risk is not limited to physical or financial harm; it also manifests in diminished perceived value and unmet professional aspirations. The gap directly affects career confidence and long-term perception of international mobility.

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7. *Institutional Accountability*

A recurring concern is fragmented oversight. Monitoring mechanisms are often limited once students are placed abroad, and structured feedback loops may be inconsistent. Students frequently report feeling unsupported during crises or after returning home.

To systematically understand how risks are distributed across actors, Table 1 maps identified risk categories against primary stakeholders. The table demonstrates that while risks span multiple domains, students bear the most concentrated exposure, whereas institutions and employers retain structural responsibility in administrative and compliance-related areas.

Table 1. Risk Mapping of Internship Stakeholders

Risk type	Description	Student	Educational institutes	Local Employer
Academic	Internship requirements are not fulfilled	✓	✓	
Administrative	Institutional Accountability	✓	✓	✓
Cultural	Discrimination & Racism	✓		✓
	Conflict in host countries and students' cultural background leading to conflict	✓		✓
Financial	Theft	✓		
	Air tickets	✓		
	Housing and food	✓		
Logistic	Transportation	✓		
Security	Security Risks (War, Terrorism, Kidnap, Crime, Mafia exploitation)	✓	✓	✓
Health	Accident	✓	✓	✓
	Epidemic	✓	✓	✓
	Medical Emergency	✓		
Job	Job-Related Risks (Exploitation, menial tasks)	✓		
	Employer Harassment	✓		
	Peer Group Harassment	✓		✓
	Job description not the same as mentioned	✓	✓	
	Employer not fulfilling the commitments	✓	✓	
Legal	Legal Risks (Visa violations, law misunderstandings, contracts)	✓	✓	✓
Environmental/Natural	Environmental Risks (Accidents, Natural Disasters)	✓	✓	✓
Emotional/psychological factor	Psychological Risks (Homesickness, Stress)	✓		✓
	Expectation – Reality Gap	✓	✓	✓
	The student wants to return		✓	✓
Technological	Cybersecurity, data misuse	✓		
Geopolitical	Change in visa rules, policy, and instability	✓	✓	✓
Communication	Language barriers and miscommunication risks	✓		✓

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Table 1 illustrates the multidimensional distribution of risks across key internship stakeholders – students, educational institutions, and host employers. The mapping clearly indicates that students bear the highest concentration of direct exposure, particularly in financial, health, psychological, job-related, and cultural risk domains. These risks affect their immediate well-being, safety, and learning outcomes.

Educational institutions, while less exposed to direct physical or financial risks, hold significant responsibility in academic, administrative, legal, and geopolitical categories, reflecting their oversight and governance role. Local employers share exposure primarily in job-related, cultural, legal, and security risks, particularly where workplace conduct, contractual compliance, and supervision are concerned.

The table underscores an uneven distribution of vulnerability, revealing that operational risks are largely individualized at the student level, whereas structural control mechanisms reside with institutions and employers. This imbalance reinforces the need for coordinated risk governance and shared accountability to ensure that internship objectives are not undermined by unmanaged vulnerabilities.

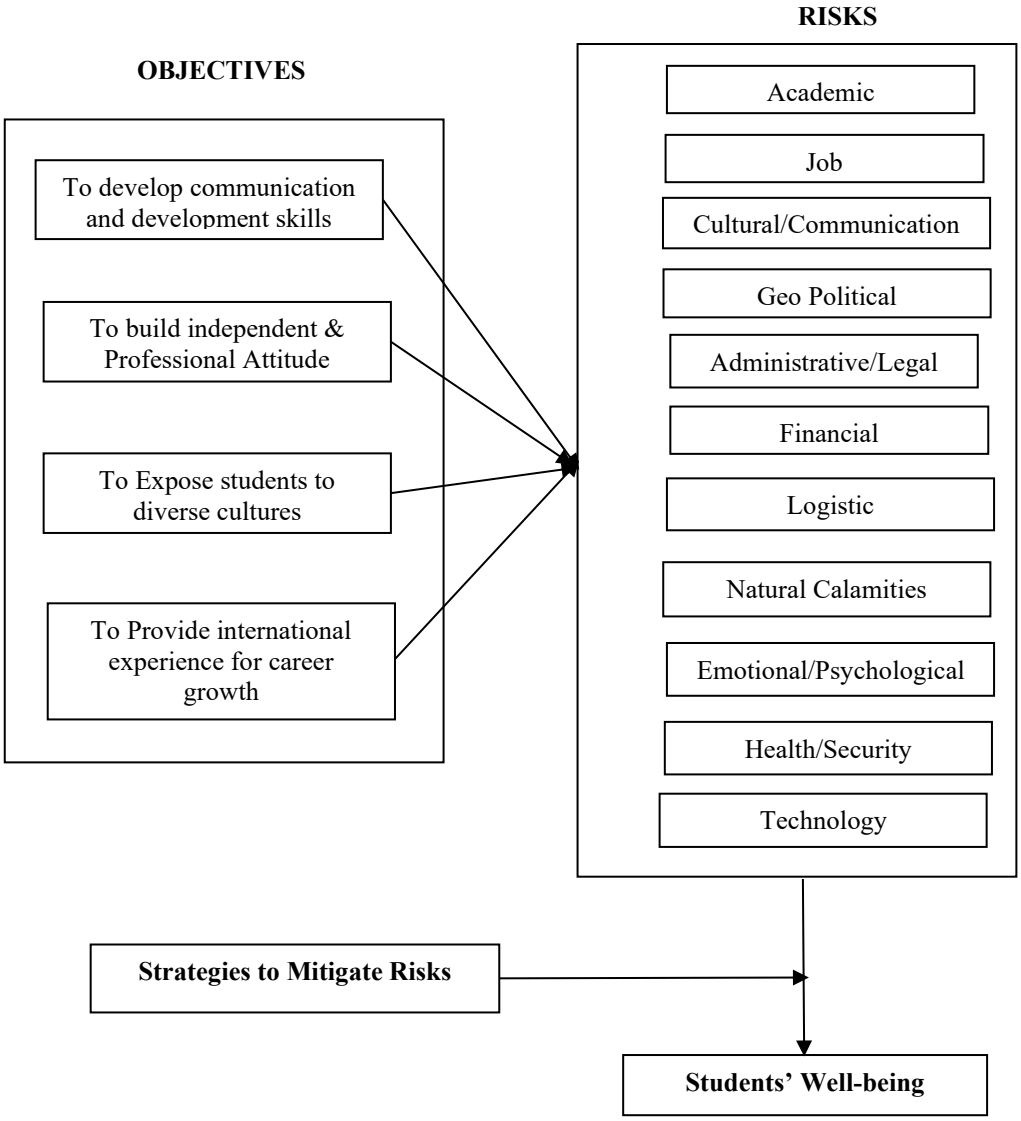

Fig 1. Internship Risk Mapping Framework Model

Building upon the stakeholder risk distribution identified in Table 1, Table 2 presents the Integrated Internship Risk Mapping Framework (IIRMF). The framework aligns internship objectives with corresponding risks,

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potential impacts, and structured mitigation strategies, thereby transforming diagnostic insights into actionable governance tools.

Table 2. Integrated Internship Risk Mapping Framework (IIRMF)
A consolidated map of objectives, risks, impact, and mitigating strategies

Objectives	Relevant Risks	Impact	Risk Reduction /Mitigation Strategies
1. *To develop communication & negotiation skills*	***Academic**:* internship requirements not fulfilled, employer feedback gaps, monitoring difficulties	Students may struggle to practice communication if feedback loops are weak or if they face hostility, discrimination, or miscommunication.	Regular online reporting
	Job: employer/peer harassment		Video conferencing with mentors
	Cultural/Communication: discrimination, racism, language barriers		Structured employer feedback systems
	Geopolitical: anti-immigration sentiment		Orientation on intercultural communication
			Emergency support contacts. Coordinate with Embassies and other related ministries.
2. *To build an independent & professional attitude*	***Administrative**:* Institutional accountability, legal conflicts	Students may be forced into crises that test their independence, resilience, and professionalism.	Pre-departure training Insurance coverage
	***Financial**:* theft, housing/food challenges, air tickets		Legal contracts & checklists
	***Logistic**:* transportation issues, Health: accidents, epidemics, medical emergencies		Orientation on local laws & safety
	***Environmental/Natural calamities**:* Earthquake, Pandemics		Resilience workshops
			Disaster preparedness orientation
	Emotional/Psychological: homesickness, stress, expectation–reality gap		Counselling & peer support networks
3. To expose students to diverse cultures	***Academic:*** job description mismatch	Cultural exposure may be limited or negatively coloured by discrimination, unmet expectations, or unsafe conditions.	Careful partner selection
	Job: employer not fulfilling commitments		Background checks
	***Cultural**:* discrimination & racism, conflict with host culture		Contracts with clear job descriptions
	***Geopolitical/Security**:* terrorism, instability, war		Cultural sensitivity training
	Emotional/Psychological: expectation–reality gap, desire to return		Monitoring travel advisories
			Pre-departure intercultural simulations

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			Counselling for adaptation challenges
4. To provide international experience for career growth	***Financial**:* air tickets, housing costs	Career experience may be cut short or undermined if placements collapse due to external risks, exploitation, or technological breaches.	Insurance Strong institutional partnerships
	***Health/Security**:* medical emergencies, kidnapping, war		Contingency placements Enforce learning contracts with mid-term task audits Support funds for low-income students to subsidize visas/housing
	Job: exploitation, harassment, menial tasks		Emergency evacuation plans
	Technological: cybersecurity, data misuse		Continuous communication systems
	Environmental/Natural: calamities disrupting placements		Cybersecurity protocols & data protection
			Career mentoring & alumni networks

Table 2 represents the central intellectual contribution of this study by introducing the Integrated Internship Risk Mapping Framework (IIRMF), a structured model that moves beyond fragmented risk identification toward objective-driven risk governance. Its novelty lies in shifting the analytical lens from isolated risk categories (e.g., financial or cultural challenges examined independently) to a systematic alignment of internship objectives with specific risk domains, their potential impacts, and corresponding mitigation mechanisms. Rather than merely cataloguing vulnerabilities, the framework establishes a functional linkage between what internships aim to achieve and what may undermine those aims. This objective–risk–impact–mitigation alignment transforms the model into both a diagnostic tool—capable of revealing structural weaknesses—and a prescriptive instrument that offers actionable institutional responses. By integrating stakeholder accountability directly into the framework, it addresses the previously identified imbalance in risk exposure and operational control.

Furthermore, the IIRMF integrates multiple dimensions—academic, financial, socio-cultural, health, legal, environmental, technological, and geopolitical—within a single cohesive architecture. It recognizes that risks are interdependent rather than discrete; for example, financial strain may intensify psychological stress, while geopolitical instability may disrupt career progression objectives. By embedding these interconnections within a structured matrix, the framework enables institutions to anticipate cascading effects rather than responding reactively to isolated incidents. Although developed within the tourism and hospitality context, its architecture is inherently transferable. Any discipline incorporating international work-integrated learning (e.g., business, healthcare, engineering, political studies) operates under similar exposure to mobility-related risks. Because the framework is objective-centred rather than sector-bound, it can be adapted to diverse academic fields and geopolitical contexts, thereby extending its relevance beyond tourism and positioning it as a scalable model for global internship governance.

The findings suggest a ‘shared risk paradox,’ wherein institutions promote internationalization while externalizing substantial operational risks onto students. Table 1 clearly illustrates how risk exposure is unevenly distributed across stakeholders, with students bearing the highest concentration of direct vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

The study confirms that international internships, while offering meaningful opportunities for skill development and global engagement, operate within layered and intersecting risk environments. Discrimination, financial precarity, cultural adjustment challenges, legal uncertainties, and institutional oversight gaps collectively shape internship outcomes.

The evidence demonstrates that risks are multidimensional and interconnected rather than isolated occurrences. Financial stress amplifies psychological strain; discrimination weakens learning outcomes; geopolitical instability intensifies safety concerns; and weak institutional monitoring magnifies exploitation risks.
Importantly, risk exposure is unevenly distributed. Students carry the most immediate and personal vulnerabilities, while institutions and employers retain structural authority over program design and operational safeguards. This imbalance underscores the necessity of shared accountability.

The Integrated Internship Risk Mapping Framework (IIRMF) presented in Table 2 represents the principal contribution of this research. By systematically linking internship objectives with specific risks, impacts, and mitigation strategies, the framework advances both theoretical understanding and practical application. It transforms risk identification into a structured governance tool capable of strengthening resilience, transparency, and program sustainability.

Recommendations
Effective mitigation requires coordinated action among students, educational institutions, host organizations, and policy actors. The following strategic directions emerge from the findings:

1. Strengthened Institutional Monitoring
- Implement structured reporting systems (scheduled online check-ins, digital monitoring platforms).
- Enforce mid-term evaluations and documented employer feedback loops.
- Conduct periodic audits of host organizations.
- Ensure that institutions maintain ***open and accessible communication channels at all times****, enabling* students to report concerns and receive timely guidance during their placements.

2. Legal and Administrative Safeguards
- Standardize learning agreements with clearly defined job roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure visa compliance guidance and legal literacy training before departure.
- Develop partner screening checklists and due diligence protocols.

3. Financial Risk Mitigation
- Review stipend adequacy relative to local living costs.
- Establish emergency support funds for vulnerable students.
- Provide pre-departure financial planning workshops.

4. Health and Safety Protocols
- Mandate comprehensive health and travel insurance coverage.
- Deliver pre-departure briefings on local emergency systems and risk environments.
- Develop evacuation and contingency plans for crisis scenarios.

5. Workplace Protection Mechanisms
- Conduct background checks of employers.
- Ensure that ***employment contracts clearly specify job roles, responsibilities, and expected tasks*** to prevent role ambiguity and exploitation.
- Provide a ***designated local mentor or supervisor*** within the host organization to guide interns and address workplace concerns.
- Clarify grievance reporting channels accessible during placements.
- Provide orientation on workplace rights and harassment reporting procedures.

6. Psychological and Reintegration Support
- Offer counselling and peer support networks before, during, and after placement.
- Implement structured reintegration sessions upon return.
- Use post-return surveys to document risk incidents and skill gains systematically.

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